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Nov 22, 1990

Dear Ma —

[illegible] check and [illegible] Both will be very ~~[illegible]~~ (U1) to me. I've [illegible] they [illegible] me very well.

I suppose Dave has already told you that I have broken off correspondence with him. I imagine he's already given you his own version of my reasons. If I know him, there's a better than even chance that he's got my reasons all garbled and misinterpreted, AND I want to explain to you myself why I have got to correspond with him.

You will have noticed that Dave and I have very different personalities indeed. Dave is very kind and generous, but he has certain other traits that I find irritating. I always did find him irritating in certain ways, and that was probably part of the reason why we had so many squabbles when we were kids and why I often insulted him and harrassed him verbally (for which, by the way, I have since apologized to him, for whatever good that may do). At the same time I always had a strong affection for him, partly because along with his irritating traits, he also had attractive ones, but mainly just because he was my little brother. But the point is that, leaving aside the fact that we were brothers, he was not the type of person whom I would much like, or with whom I would want to make friends. And he still isn't.

Because of my affection for him I was willing to put up with his irritating side up to a point. But in recent years he has just irritated me beyond

endurance, in the following way.

He is a habitual rationalizer. Whenever in any discussion with him we approach a subject about which he is sensitive, or about which he has written or whenever he feels as if big brother is somehow threatening his ego, instead of facing the problem frankly he resorts to evasions and rationalizations. Being constituted as I am, I find it extremely difficult to refrain from pointing out the holes in his rationalizations. When I do point them out, he resorts to still other evasions and rationalizations in order to avoid admitting that I was right about his earlier rationalizations. (In one very rare moment of frankness he admitted to me, in effect, that he had done this in order to protect his ego against what he perceived as threat from big brother; but that was long after the argument in question had been concluded.) He then accuses me of having "positivistic" assumptions, but he never specifies what these supposed assumptions are. Any attempt to analyse his own arguments, or my "assumptions", he fails with more evasions and rationalizations — by dismissing the whole subject as irrelevant and starting off on a different tack.

I'll give an example of his rationalization, or let us say of his refusal to face a criticism frankly and directly, which is a particularly good example because it is the only case I can remember in which he actually admitted later, in effect, that he'd been rationalizing. In a story he wrote, he described an old man's face as being "like cracked mud". I criticized this simile on the grounds that it wasn't clear what he meant by it. He answered my criticism by explaining that the man's face was

some kinds of mud; and it was opaque, again like mud, and he connected this capacity with the man's facial expression being [illegible] something like [illegible]. I tried pointing out to him that this was an ineffective way of [illegible] since he [illegible] could be clever enough to figure out that all these meanings were supposed to be conveyed by the expression face "like cracked mud". In the only instance in which I have ever (EVER) known him to make a concession in any of our discussions*, Dave often admitted, in effect, that he had just invented the argument about the elaborate simile because he didn't know what else to say in response to my challenge. Really he had just used that figure of speech because to him it "felt right". This is a perfectly good reason, since a fiction-writer's job is to appeal to his reader's feelings and not to his intellect. And this is the reason he should have given in the first place, rather than resorting to a rationalization. (*[illegible])

Several years ago, after a long and particularly frustrating philosophical discussion, Dave and I agreed to keep off philosophical subjects in the future. But, I have found it impossible to keep off these subjects with him because he keeps bringing ideology into discussions that start out on entirely different subjects. Apparently he does this as a means to avoid difficult conflicts or to parry what he sees as a threat to his ego from big brother. For example: You may remember that several years ago Joel

Dave himself said he was worried about Joel and (4) described his personal habits as "grotesque" — snots running down his lip and so forth. Joel himself regarded himself as having a serious problem and was spending a lot of money on crackpot treatments for it, and he himself evidently regarded it as a brain problem since (by Dave's account) he ascribed it to his old head injury. So I wrote to Dave and suggested to him that Joel very likely had a brain problem (conceivably the old head injury but more likely something like schizophrenia), and I further suggested that Dave might try to persuade either Joel or Joel's father that Joel ought to be examined by a neurologist or a neurologically-oriented psychiatrist [as opposed to a psychoanalytically-oriented psychiatrist] rather than wasting his money on all these crackpot treatments.

Dave at first seemed in two minds about my suggestion, but gave some reasons that disinclined him to follow it. I pointed out some flaws in his reasons, he gave further reasons and I pointed out flaws in them. The more I pointed out flaws in his reasoning, the more Dave resorted to evasion and rationalizations. He dismissed my arguments because they were (he claimed) based on my supposed "positivist" assumptions (which he failed to specify), and he claimed that the visions of a schizophrenic were just as "real" as the perceptions of a "normal" person*.

I think what was happening here may have been this:

*From a certain point of view one could argue in favor of this claim, but Dave gave no good argument, and what is worse, he resisted any attempt to analyse the meaning of the -1-

Dave was in conflict over what to do about Joel because on the one hand, it would perhaps have been painful for Joel and certainly would have been difficult and stressful for Dave, if Dave went to Joel and tried to persuade him that he ought to be examined by a psychiatrist, on the other hand, Joel might be relieved of much pain and trouble if he did go to a psychiatrist. Instead of facing up to the stress and conflict directly, Dave (in the fashion that is typical of him) resorted to rationalizations that would strengthen the reasons for doing nothing and weaken the side of an argument that would push him to do something. When I pointed out the flaws in his rationalizations, Dave, because he has a little ego problem vis-a-vis big brother, resorted to further rationalizations in order to avoid having to make any concession to my reasoning. And so it went.

I certainly wouldn't demand that Dave listen to my reasoning. If he would simply refuse to discuss these matters and then go and do or believe whatever he wants to do or believe, that's his business as far as I am concerned. What drives me up the wall is his habit of rationalizing, of using devious methods to avoid conflict in his own mind or the necessity of making any concession in a discussion with me.

Imagine that you are playing a game of chess with someone. Painstakingly and meticulously you work your opponent into a corner, but as soon as he sees that you're about to checkmate him he sweeps all the pieces off the board and proclaims that the

to be changed, or something of that sort, and you have to start all over again. Once more you painstakingly work him into a corner, and again he sweeps all the pieces off the board.... and so forth, over and over again. Wouldn't that drive you up the wall with frustration? It certainly does me. And that's what my correspondence with Dave is like*.

Add that to the fact that he's the type of person whom I would find irritating in any case, and you'll see why I just can't stand him any more. Hence I'm not going to correspond with him from now on.

*This is th a simplification and exaggeration, but it does convey the general idea.

(When I mentioned Joel's case above, I forgot to emphasize that the issue here is not whether Joel does or does not have schizophrenia or any other brain problem. I don't know whether he does or not, and Dave is free to disagree with me about that. What bugs me is Dave's evasive method of argument.)

Now I want to make it clear that my decision to break off communication with Dave is neither frivolous nor petty — it's a very serious matter for me. You once sent me a newspaper clipping in which it was mentioned that electrocardiograms of a normal heart are not <u>perfectly</u> regular. This seems to indicate that you think I am just imagining my heart irregularities on the basis of normal minute deviations from regularity. I can assure you that this is not the case. For example, in a few cases my heart has stopped dead for two or three seconds, and I've thought, "Well, this is it." Then it started going again. Much more often, for two or three

I have often said you like nice long letters from me. My recent letters have been long enough, but they haven't dealt with entertaining subjects, and I doubt that you enjoyed them. So here's a letter on casual subjects; perhaps you will find it entertaining.

I got a letter from Juan Sánchez the other day. I had mentioned to him what you had told me about your father's Christmas activities in Poland — going from village to village with a group of young men and put on a morality play in each one. Juan said that 50 years ago they used to have a similar custom in Mexico, with about a dozen persons in each dramatic group. I wonder whether this was a custom that existed throughout medieval Europe and survived in "backward" regions.

Speaking of old-fashioned customs, I recently read in a book on folklore that as late as the early 20th century ancient, pagan fertility rites were still being performed in some parts of the U.S., in order to make the crops grow. I mean really primitive stuff — the kind of thing that you read about in Frazer's Golden Bough and that goes back to the dawn of civilization. And this stuff was not being performed by immigrants from exotic countries but by old-line American backwoods families who originated in the British Isles. Some of it is hilarious. Here is a sample:

For sowing flax, the farmer and his wife go out in the field before sunup, stark naked. The woman walks ahead of the man and the man sows the seed. Then chant a rhyme with the line, "Up to my ass, and higher too!" And every few steps the man throws some of the seed against his wife's behind. When the sowing is done

This was hilarious — she laughed and laughed.

Speaking of girl-watching — a few months ago I read in the paper about the case of an ~~associate~~ professor at some college who was sitting at the college pool watching the girls in their skimpy bathing suits. Some of the girls decided he was leering and had him hauled before the college grievance committee on a charge of "sexual harrassment". The hapless professor was required to undergo "counselling to find out why he had an urge to "leer" at women.

These people are loonies. 25 years ago, if a young man didn't have an urge to look at pretty women, people would wonder if there was something wrong with him. Of course, if the prof. was staring too persistently, the young women might reasonably feel uncomfortable, but in that case the appropriate procedure would be to request him politely but firmly not to stare. If he still persisted then they might have a case for the grievance committee. As it was, the case was ridiculous.

How was your trip to Florida (if you did go)? How did Tyler's leg turn out?

— Ted